

# The Event that Reverberated the Power of Unity and Solidarity among Teachers, Employees, Labour and Urban Poor

Lakhs of employees, teachers, workers, outsourcing and contract employees from all corners of Andhra Pradesh came to Vijayawada on February 3 by responding to the 'Chalo Vijayawada' call given by PRC Sadhana Porata Samithi (Committee fighting for achieving Pay Revision Committee recommendations). The government has tried in vain all means to water down the movement. Just two days before the commencement of the event it refused permission to the rally on the pretext of Covid regulations; gave notices to hundreds of leaders; placed some of the leaders under house arrest and issued orders not to grant any leave. Many of the teachers and employees who started for the event were arrested and detained at local police stations; Private vehicles were stopped and taken to the nearest police stations. Those who appeared suspicious at bus stands, railway stations and check posts were either sent back or detained. Travel Agencies are forewarned not to rent vehicles to those attending 'Chalo Vijayawada'. Ruling Party cadre and 'village volunteers' carried out anti-employee propaganda.

Yet, employees and teachers reached their friends and relatives' homes in Vijayawada, one or two days before. Some came in disguise. Some others came in the guise of a wedding party. Some got down from trains and buses in the outskirts and came on foot or by share autos to the venue. By 9 am thousands of people made a sudden appearance at the venue APNGO office. APTF in procession with thousands of employees reached the venue BRTS road by maneuvering through small streets to avoid the police. By 10:30 am the sea of people stretched over three-kilometer long along the BRTS road. The police gave up, unable to do anything. PRC committee leaders arrived at the venue on a special flight and held a meeting. Small meetings were held at many places along the procession. Songs were sung along with sloganeering. The participants marched forward with the spirit of the movement. Bezawada, the cradle of the movement, stood witness to the gigantic mass rally of February 3. BRTS road turned red with the red flags and echoed with the slogans. No matter how many restrictions are imposed, no matter how many disruptions are caused, between

50,000 and one lakh people marched in the Vijayawada city and the Dharna lasted until 3 pm, uninterrupted.

The government was shocked to see this unexpected turn of events. It assumed that employees will succumb to threats but ended up in disappointment. The people in the localities provided water and buttermilk to the marching teachers and employees and provided assistance. 'Chalo Vijayawada' was a huge success to the astonishment of the government. It garnered the attention of the people in the entire state. All opposition parties and trade unions extended their support.

### **How did Employees, Teachers and Workers become Victims?**

PRC which was achieved to combat the rising prices and inflation was reversed by the government into a wage reduction scheme while employees, teachers and pensioners in the state are looking to take their salaries to the level of Telangana state.

Lakhs of young employees and teachers are on fire at the CPS and are, demanding its replacement. Government has abolished the Additional Quantum of Pension given to 70 and 75 years aged which was achieved to cope with ill health in old age. It also demanded pensioners to repay thousands of rupees that were already given. So Pensioners are very angry and are up in arms.

Contract employees, who have been waiting for regular salaries for more than three decades and outsourcing employees seeking equal pay for equal work, joined the movement with determination.

Those who quit software jobs for government jobs find themselves without regular salaries for at least two years and saw postponement for another six months are now told that they won't be receiving their regular salary with the new PRC. So 1.5 lakhs of village, ward and secretariat employees came on to roads even before anyone else.

RTC personnel, who have become public transport employees after takeover of RTC Corporation by the government, are not getting the facilities of government employees and even lost the facilities that were there while it was a corporation. So they too joined the movement.

### **How did such Opposition to the Government come about?**

During his march on foot in the state before he became the Chief Minister, Y.S.Jaganmohan Reddy promised 27 percent fitment to employees, give good PRC, release DA from time to time, and abolish CPS within a week of coming to power. But after he became the CM, except IR he ignored all other promises to

employees. As the government gave Navaratnas to some sections of the people, declared itself people friendly, employees expected that their demands will be met. As a result of the illusions created by the Chief Minister, the working class and teachers eagerly waited for more than two and a half years due to Corona and didn't initiate any movements. APTF started building a movement from July 2021 followed by FAPTO. Thousands of teachers joined the 'Chalo Vijayawada' meeting held on November 2 under the auspices of APTF. The JAC leaders who attended the meeting announced that if the government does not respond to their demands JAC will launch agitation programs.

The JAC which is a single United Front was divided into two during the last government. This government ensured further divisions into 4 JACs. But situations forced AP JAC and Amravati JAC to unite and launch united agitation programs. But the government ignored this united front and invited Joint Staff Council for talks. The Joint Staff Council which was set up by the government to resolve employee grievances never solved any issue. Government brought it to front stage to undermine the unity of employees. Even after 17 rounds of negotiations, nothing positive came out. Finally on January 5<sup>th</sup>, The Chief Minister convened a meeting of the Joint Staff Council and gave a patient hearing to the unions. But on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Jan, government unilaterally declared PRC with a 23 percent fitment which is less than the IR (Interim Relief). It requested to discuss other issues with the authorities. But the authorities without any talks notified the new PRC on January 17<sup>th</sup>. The new PRC has 23 percent fitment, cut in HRA, removed CCA [City Compensatory Allowance] and removed Additional Quantum payments to pensioners. This led to a sharp cut in salaries. But by releasing the pending DAs the pay slips for the month showed an increase.

The PRC made the teachers and employees' hackles rise. Fitment was lesser than IR; CCA removed; Quantum of pension removed; the term of pay revision increased from five years to ten years in-line with the Center; Ashutosh Mishra committee report on PRC was not disclosed. Immediately, the teachers' United Front, FAPTO called for the siege of the offices of the Collectors. Thousands of teachers took part in the siege held on 20<sup>th</sup> of January. The events forced the four JACs to form a united 'PRC Sadhana Samithi'. Under its auspices, rallies, dharnas and hunger strikes were held in the district centers. The protest programs were enthusiastically attended by employees, teachers and workers. As a next step PRC Sadhana Samithi has decided to organise 'Chalo Vijayawada' on 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb and to go on strike from midnight of 6<sup>th</sup> February. 'Chalo Vijayawada' call was a huge success.

The PRC Sadhana Samithi rejected the salaries as per new PRC and demanded salaries as per existing norms. With this even normal people stopped believing the govt. and came to the true conclusion that the new PRC actually decreased the salaries of employees. However, the government wanted to go ahead with its arrogance. It pressurized Treasury, Pay and Accounts, DDO department employee to immediately process salaries of teachers and employees as per new PRC on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. But even these department employees refused to support the govt. move. So the government used new software through CFMS and deposited salaries and pensions at the nick of the hour. Issued pay slips immediately. The authorities tried to promote the DA arrears as increased salary with the help of the media. But no employee was in illusions.

The government appointed a Five member committee- three ministers, Chief Adviser and Principal Secretary for talks with the employees. But there was no progress through the discussions. So 'Chalo Vijayawada' was organised. Responding to the Call, Employees and teachers moved voluntarily in huge numbers.

### **Specialities of "Chalo Vijayawada"**

1. Huge number of employees, teachers, workers and pensioners moved voluntarily from all corners of the state even though much preparatory work was not done and leadership initiative was less.
2. Even though leadership gave no concrete directions to overcome the government obstacles, employees with their own plans, out maneuvered police and intelligence to reach the destination.
3. First APTF, then FAPTO prompted this United Movement.
4. PRC GOs made the employees vitriolic. There was no employee who is neutral.
5. Leaders of the Joint Staff Council who appreciated the 23 percent fitment during the talks with the Chief Minister were now given enough strength by the brave agitations of lakhs of teachers, employees and pensioners. Thus the same leaders mustered their courage, formed the PRC Sadhana Samithi and fought with the government for their demands.
6. Here the situation of leaders cheering up cadre reversed and instead cadre are cheering up and giving encouragement and courage to leaders. This has been repeatedly acknowledged by the leadership itself.
7. The event reminded the leadership to perceive the favourable material conditions and indicated the necessity of leading the movement firmly, unitedly until the end.
8. It undermined the dictatorial attitude of the government that no one in the state should agitate.

9. There was a broad unity in the state working class. RTC employees, High Court employees, village-ward, Secretariat staff and contract-outsourcing employees. Employees of public sector companies also came forward to participate in the strike.

Despite such favourable conditions, the leadership could not withstand. It participated in the long debates with the Committee of Ministers but could achieve only a few demands. It couldn't achieve even 1% increase in their main demand on fitment. So teachers' unions came out of the discussion in the middle. Government indirectly ensured dividing the Unions, ensured the presence of their men in the PRC committee leadership and lead to the abrupt halt of the movement. Thus it watered down the fervour of the agitating people. It warmed up the shivers of the government with their hands. By appointing Chandrasekhar Reddy, the former JAC chairman, as its new advisor, the government deceived the employees to its terms.

The dissatisfaction and unrest that was brewing among the salaried class erupted with this movement. It exposed the nature of the ruling classes and their stooges. The exploitation policies and deeds of the ruling classes also hit teachers and employees, the middle class. It is inevitable for the teachers, employees, labor, and other urban, rural poor to emerge as a united, resolute force to achieve their just demands.